

Draft
Environmental Assessment

***Resumed Largemouth Bass Stocking
in Placid Lake***

April 2015



***Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks***

Region 2
3201 Spurgin Rd., Missoula, MT 59804
406-542-5500

Draft Environmental Assessment CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of proposed state action:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to resume annual stocking of largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*) in Placid Lake.
2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:** FWP statute authority to manage Montana's sport fisheries, including sampling and research using wild fish per Section 87-1-201, Montana Code Annotated.
3. **Anticipated Schedule:**
 Estimated Commencement Date: August/September 2015
 Estimated Completion Date: Ongoing annual plant until further notice
4. **Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township – included map):**

Missoula County; T16N, R15W, Sections 17, 19,20, 28, 29, 30 (Figure 1)
5. **Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:**

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>0</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
(b) Open Space/	<u>0</u>	Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian/Water	<u>1,350</u>	Rangeland	<u>0</u>
		Other	<u>0</u>

6. **Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.**

- (a) **Permits:** permits will be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.

Agency Name	Permits
None	

(b) **Funding:**

Agency Name	Funding Amount
FWP	~ \$5,000 (annual)

(c) **Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:**

Agency Name	Type of Responsibility
USFWS	Federal Endangered Species Act

7. **Narrative summary of the proposed action:** FWP proposes to resume stocking largemouth bass in Placid Lake to enhance the existing bass sport fishery. The lake was last stocked in 1950 and has maintained a self-sustaining largemouth bass population since that time. Stocking would occur annually with disease-free fish from the FWP hatchery system (or other approved, disease-free sources) to provide recruitment stability (consistent production and survival of juvenile fish). Initial stocking rates would be 10-40 per surface acre annually. The long-term goal is to improve the quality of a non-native sport fishery to enhance angler opportunity in an area with limited negative effects to native trout restoration.

Enhancement of the Placid Lake sport fishery is one component of proposed, larger scale management actions on lakes in the Clearwater River basin. Proposed actions on other lakes in the vicinity (Alva, Inez, Seeley, and Salmon) include providing new harvest opportunity for bass through removal of catch-and-release angling regulations. These changes are proposed as part of efforts to enhance native trout populations on main-stem lakes. Alternatively, the proposed action (stocking largemouth bass) is intended to enhance nearby sport fishing opportunities on Placid Lake, which is not a native trout stronghold and supports habitat that is more appropriate for warm water fisheries.

8. **Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:**

Alternative A: No Action. Continue the current situation of inconsistent largemouth bass natural recruitment and a marginal bass fishery on Placid Lake.

Alternative B: Proposed Action. Prescribe annual stocking of largemouth bass in Placid Lake by FWP staff to supplement natural recruitment and improve the sport fishery.

9. **Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:**

Largemouth bass to be planted would be from a source that has undergone appropriate disease testing and has been authorized by the FWP Fish Health Committee.

Proposed stocking rates are low and are proposed to help provide consistent recruitment in years when natural reproduction is limited.

Largemouth bass and other fish populations in Placid Lake would continue to be monitored by FWP. Angler use and satisfaction are also monitored via annual mail survey.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality				X		
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X		X	A.7
8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species			X			A.8
9. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
10. Changes to abundance or movement of species			X		X	A.10

A.7 & A.8. Placid Lake still supports bull trout (a Federally Threatened species under the Federal Endangered Species Act and a Montana Species of Concern [SOC]), stocked westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*, Montana SOC), and several other endemic and introduced fish species including brown trout (*Salmo trutta*), northern pikeminnow (*Ptychocheilus oregonensis*), largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*), kokanee (*Oncorhynchus nerka*), yellow perch (*Perca flavescens*), pumpkinseed sunfish (*Lepomis gibbosus*), and brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*). Bull trout abundance is extremely low and the population is likely no longer viable based on recent sampling. Largemouth bass and other predators may compete with sub-adult and adult bull trout due to dietary overlap. Although primary prey items are typically invertebrates, largemouth bass likely also prey opportunistically on juvenile bull trout at some low level as part of their omnivorous diet. However, other predators such as brown trout and northern pikeminnow are more likely to be limiting factors for sensitive trout species because of their high abundance and dietary preferences.

A.10. Supplemental stocking is proposed to increase the abundance of largemouth bass in Placid Lake. However, largemouth bass would continue to comprise a small proportion (<5 %) of the total fish community.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects				X		
2. Land use				X		
3. Risk and/or health hazards				X		
4. Community impact				X		
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				X		
7. Aesthetics and recreation			X			B.7
8. Cultural and historic resources				X		
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

B.7. Enhanced largemouth bass fishery would provide more consistent and better quality recreation opportunity for anglers on a heavily used lake.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

Supplemental annual stocking of largemouth bass is proposed on Placid Lake to provide more consistent recruitment and to enhance the existing warm water sport fishery. Although Placid Lake is listed as bull trout *critical habitat* by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, lake and tributary monitoring indicate that the population is near extirpation due to a number of contributing factors. The westslope cutthroat trout population in the lake is maintained primarily through annual hatchery supplementation.

Enhancement of the warm-water bass fishery on Placid Lake is proposed to help balance management emphasis on coldwater native trout in neighboring lakes in the Clearwater River basin (i.e., Lakes Alva, Inez, Seeley and Salmon). Whereas bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout populations are viable and improving in most of these waters, native wild trout populations are nearly absent in Placid Lake. Therefore, FWP proposes to implement the proposed action and supplement the existing largemouth bass population in Placid Lake.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners about the opportunity to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternative:

- Legal notices will be published once in each of these newspapers: *Independent Record* (Helena), *Missoulian*, and *Seeley Pathfinder* (Seeley Lake)
- Public notice will be posted on FWP's webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("News," then "Public Notices"). The Draft EA will also be available on this webpage, along with the opportunity to submit comments online.
- Direct mailing or email notification will be made to adjacent landowners and other interested parties (individuals, groups, agencies) to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

Copies of this draft EA may also be obtained by mail from Region 2 FWP, 3201 Spurgin Rd., Missoula 59804; by phoning 406-542-5540; by emailing shrose@mt.gov; or by viewing FWP's Internet website <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("Public Notices," beginning April 6, 2015).

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

2. **Duration of comment period:**

The public comment period will extend for thirty (30) days beginning with publication of the legal notice in the *Missoulian*. **Comments must be received by FWP no later than 5:00 p.m. on May 5, 2015.**

Comments should be directed by:

mail to: FWP Region 2, Attn: Sharon Rose, 3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804;

phone to: 406-542-5540; or

email to: shrose@mt.gov.

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. **Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)?**
No.

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

The project proposes a minor change in fisheries management and involves stocking of an introduced sport fish that already exists at the plant location and in downstream receiving waters. Minimal public concern and controversy is expected based on management situation and discussions with partner agencies and interested sporting groups.

2. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:

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3. List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Forest Service

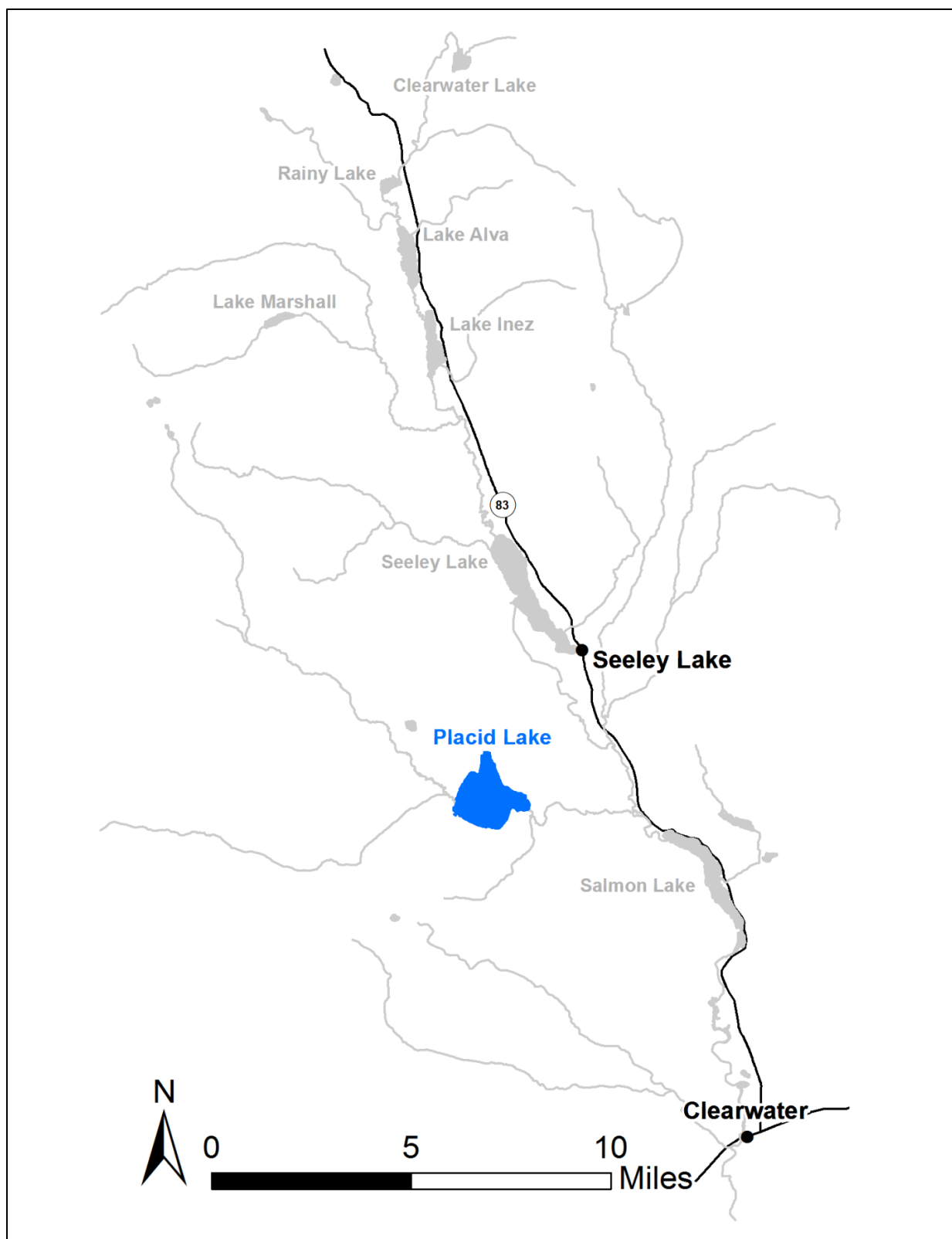


Figure 1. Location of Placid Lake near town of Seeley Lake, Missoula County.